COMIC SHOP NEWS™

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Worlds Collide Marks a Milestone For DC

Many people are plagued by bad dreams; many people suffer from restless nights caused in part by troubling night fantasies. That's the problem that Fred Bentson faces; he is bothered by the usual bad dreams of pursuit, of public embarrassment, of entrapment. Bentson assumes that must be why he feels so tired, so exhausted after awakening from what should be a good night's sleep.

What Fred Bentson doesn't realize, however, is that his problems have a much less logical—and much more troubling—cause. Fred Bentson is a postal carrier for the Metropolis Postal Service, diligently delivering the mail to the homes and offices on his route.

Fred Bentson is also a postal carrier in the city of Dakota, diligently delivering the mail to the homes and offices of that city as well.

And since Fred Bentson delivers the mail in one universe while he is supposedly asleep, he is unaware that he is living two lives... or that he might serve as a nexus between two worlds that know nothing of one another's existence.

In the DC Universe, Fred Bentson goes to dream-research scientists in Metropolis for an explanation of his sleep problems; in the Dakota Universe, he approaches Edwin Alva to help him once again sleep restfully. Before too long, though, scientists in both worlds become aware of the existence of another plane of reality, and a chain reaction begins that could cause the collapse of both universes Only the heroes of both worlds can restore order.

Worlds Collide, a fourteen-part crossover storyline running through a variety of Superman family books and Milestone titles in May and June, marks the first meeting between the heroes of these two separate continuities. **Worlds Collide** begins in ***Superman: Man of Steel #35,*** then continues into ***Hardware #17, Superboy #6, Icon #15, Steel #6, Blood Syndicate #16***, and then into a special 48-page jointly-produced jam special, ***Worlds Collide #1***; from there, the final half of the story appears in ***Superboy #7, Hardware #18, Superman: Man of Steel #36, Icon #16, Steel #7, Blood Syndicate #17,*** and ***Static #14,*** which brings the story to a dramatic conclusion in early July.

Worlds Collide #1, the centerpiece of the series, will be offered in two editions. The deluxe format edition will feature a wraparound cover polybagged with vinyl clings (the same cover format that proved so popular on ***Superman: Man of Steel #30***). The standard edition will feature the same interiors, but with a different cover and no enhancements. The interiors will feature art by Chris Batista, M.D. Bright, Chriscross, Tom Grummett, and John Paul Leon. The writers of both the Superman family and the Milestone books are involved in plotting and scripting this series.

Worlds Collide begins on May 19th, with the release of the first three chapters of the storyline; from there, fans will enjoy at least one chapter a week through the first week of July.

by Alex Kirkland

Chaos! Makes the Noose With Lynch Mob

Thus far, Chaos! Comics has built its reputation on its horror/fantasy books like ***Evil Ernie*** and ***Lady Death.*** This summer, though, the company ventures in a new direction with their first superhero title, ***Lynch Mob.***

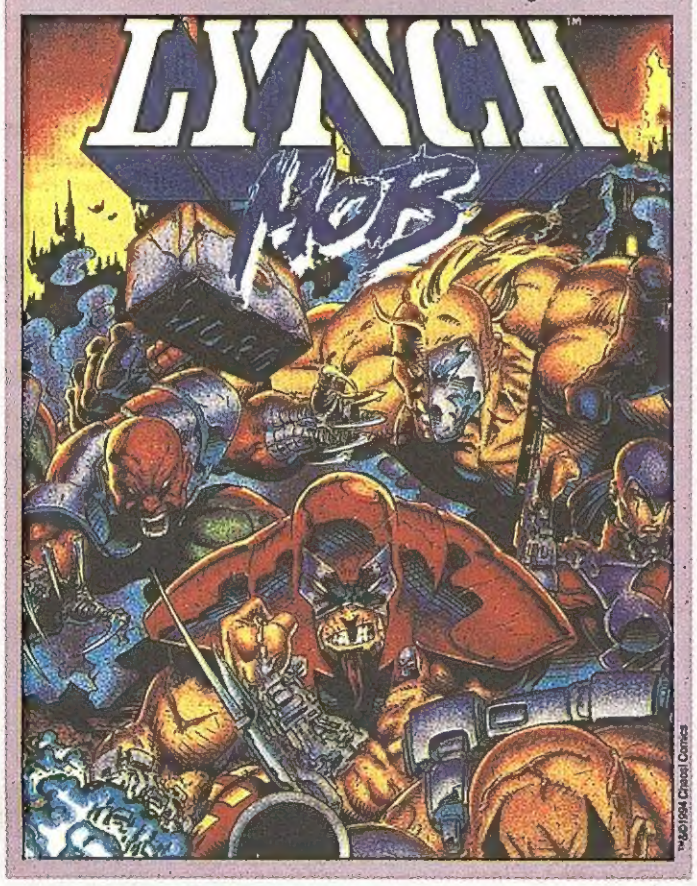
As you might expect from the publisher of ***Evil Ernie, Lynch Mob*** is a grim, action-packed series that doesn't pull any punches. "These ain't your little brother's super-heroes," ***Lynch Mob*** co-creator Brian Pulido said. "No capes and spandex here. The Mob operates like a true paramilitary outfit. On top of that, they are half 'borg and have superhuman abilities."

The series begins a half-century in the future; corporate conglomerates have replaced countries, and wealth is all-important. One of the most powerful of all conglomerates is AmeriCorp—and their private fighting force is the Lynch Mob, genetically augmented and technologically enhanced to make them the ultimate fighting unit. Soon, they are called on to confront a most unique enemy: Mother Mayhem, a being of pure electrical energy able to interface with the global computer net. AmeriCorp is eager to stop her, since their experiments led to her creation... but they don't want to destroy her. When they order Lynch Mob to hold back, the result is that the heroes are thrust through time into the present-day world... along with hundreds of super-villains who'd love to destroy the superhero team.

"We believe our current readers and new readers will dig ***Lynch Mob,***" Pulido said. "Most of today's heroes seem like inbred versionsoof establishedoones. They don't break new ground. We have a completely different perspective on the superhero."

Lynch Mob #1, written by Pulido andiillustrated by Roman Morales III and Leonardo Jiminez, will feature a Greg Capullo front cover. The $2.50 comic, which kicks off a four-issue limited series, is scheduled oor June release.

by Wayne Lee



Malibu Freex Out!

Freex, one of the founding titles of Malibu's Ultraverse line, is undergoing a major shake-up this summer, with a new artist, a new story direction, two new team members (including a new leader), and a new first-issue. ***Giant-Size Freex #1,*** written by Gerard Jones and illustrated by Scott Kolins, will also tie in with the upcoming ***UltraForce*** ultra-team launch.

"The Old Man," one of the two new characters, will take on the leadership slot in the team. Gerard Jones described the character as "a mysterious, tough, old-west wanderer obsessed with training outcast ultras to fight against Rex Mundi." When The Old Man comes into the team, ooom Boy will leave, to be replaced by Cayman, a reptilian being whose human identity might be surprising to Freex readers.

Giant-Size Freex #1 will feature Contrary (who first appeared in ***Freex #9***) as a nemesis for The Old Man. She has different goals in mind for the ultras, hoping to train them to become the vanguard of a new force that will take over the Earth, leading and protecting the non-ultras in a benevolent dictatorship.

"***Freex*** will have more exciting locales and bizarre opponents, which means higher stakes and a much quicker pace," writer Gerard Jones said. "Look for more connections to the rest of the Ultraverse, too. Foriinstance, Prime finds kindred spirits in the Freex and considers joining them."

"***Giant-Size Freex #1*** is the first anniversary issue," editor Hank Kanalz said, "and I feel we'll be coming on strong for the second year." Concerning the change in artists, Kanalz said, "Ben Herrera and Mike Christian were pivotal in establishing the initial 'look' of the book. I loved working with them both, and was lucky enough to be able to continue working with them as the regular art team on ***Firearm.***" Scott Kolins, the new artist on the series, comes to Malibu from Marvel, where he recently illustrated ***Spider-Man: Mutant Agenda*** and ***Hawkeye.***

II really am excited that there are big plans," Kolins said. "If you thought you knew where the Freex came from, there is more to be told. Be prepared to be blown away!"

The extra-length lead story will also tie in to ***UltraForce,*** which debuts in August. "Readers won't have to read ***Freex*** to understand ***UltraForce,***" Jones said, "but it will definitely make itmmuch clearer. Jones had no trouble coordinating story events with the writer of ***UltraForce,*** since he's filling that role as well. ***Giant-Size Freex #1*** will feature a Contrary backup story that also ties in to ***UltraForce.***

While ***Giant-Size Freex #1*** marks a major change in the title, it doesn't mark a relaunch of the series numbering. A month after ***Giant-Size Freex #1*** hits the stands in July, readers will be greeted with ***Freex #12,*** picking up where the extra-lengthiissue left off. ***Giant-Size Freex #1,*** a $2.50 40-page comic, is scheduled for late July release.

by Cliff Biggers

COMIC SHOP NEWS
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Somewhere Beyond the Sea

seaQuest DSV, the *Steven Spielberg* series, is leaving the water in hopes of making waves in comic shops' card racks this spring SkyBox International has announced plans to release its first series of ***seaQuest DSV Trading Cards;*** the images for the seventy-card series will be taken from original master sources using digital video transfer technology. The cards will feature images from the show's first season and pilot episode; the series will be complemented by four special foil-enhanced chase cards. ***seaQuest DSV Trading Cards,*** priced at $1.50 per pack, are scheduled for late May release.

Hyper-Reality Probe
The hyper-reality probe takes virtual reality and information retrieval to new heights. These four-legged probes have two "smart heads," or "hi" globes and can swim or walk. Hyper-reality goggles and robotic operating gloves surround the operator with the sights, sound, and even smells of the ocean depths. Movement of the operator's thumbs, hands, feet, and head moves the probe, which reads the environment in as personal a way as possible. Hyper-reality explorations takes the human body places that it normally could not go.
SkyBox
PROTOTYPE
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Wotta Lotta Warriors!

CSN has already told you about the "Time and Again" storyline that sends the New Warriors hither and yon throughout time. Well, with the old New Warriors absent from the modern-day Marvel Universe, there's an urgent need for some new New Warriors—and that's just who you'll meet in ***New Warriors #50.*** The 48-page issue will feature the debut of Darkhawk, Turbo, Dagger, Alex Power (who now calls himself PowerPax), and Bandit as New Warriors. The result is a memorable showdown between the New Warriors and the Sphinx that'll leave readers wondering just what they're going to do with all those Warriors?! *Fabian Nicieza, Darick Robertson,* and *Larry Mahlstedt* handle the creative honors for this special issue that'll be released in a standard-format $2 edition as well as a $2.95 edition enhanced with a glow-in-the-dark cover; look for them both on June 30th.

It's All Ben Dunn!

There are some big changes in store for ***Ninja High School,*** which has been absent from the comic shop racks for the past few months. When ***Ninja High School*** reappears in June with its fortieth issue, there'll be an obvious change: Eternity Comics has been replaced as publisher by Antarctic Comics, where the series originally began. The other change will be evident as soon as you open the first page of the book: ***NHS*** creator *Ben Dunn* is back at the creative helm of the title, writing and illustrating the series once again. This story picks up a month after the monstrous battle in ***NHS #s 32-36***, and a lot of changes have occurred: the town is different, and even the high school has been rebuilt. New characters are introduced, new plotlines begin here—in short, this is the perfect jumping-on point for new readers. ***Ninja High School #40***, a $2.75 comic, is scheduled for late June release.

A Tale With a Deadly Sting

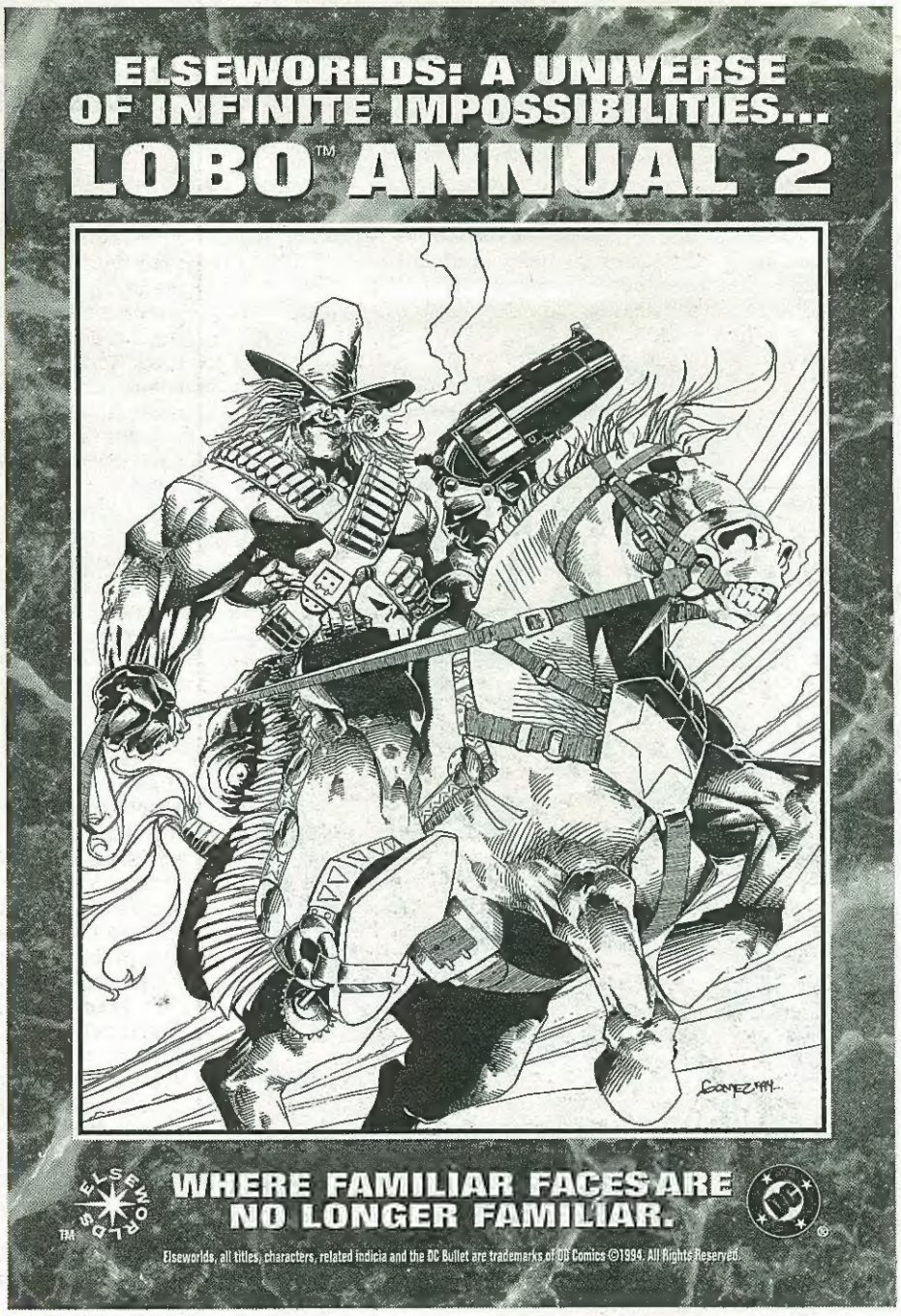
The Golden Age Sandman faces off against a new villain in ***Sandman Mystery Theatre #17,*** the premiere issue of a four-part story arc written by *Matt Wagner* and *Steven Seagle* and illustrated by *Guy Davis*. The new adversary is The Scorpion, a villain with a deadly poison-tipped whip who's making his deadly sting felt all across New York City. ***Sandman Mystery Theatre #17***, a $1.95 Vertigo/DC comic, is scheduled oor June 16th release.

Making Light of a Dangerous Situation

Being a hero means making difficult choices—and sometimes they don't turn out to be the right choices. When the Ray finds himself unable to figure out how to defend Philadelphia against an entity of light, he calls Doctor Polaris to help him. Of course, getting an inmate released from prison is a tedious, time-consuming chore... which is why the Ray takes the express route and simply breaks the good doctor out of the joint! Things don't work out quite the way the Ray envisioned, though, and before too long, he finds himself faced with two menaces: the light entity and Doctor Polaris! See the light-guy handles the heavy-duty problem in ***The Ryy #4,*** courtesy of *Christopher Priest* and *Howard Porter*; look for it on June 30th.

CSNsider

Paramount Pictures has acquired the rights to make a ***Badger*** live-action film... Continuity has put most of its titles on hiatus; the only books slated to continue are ***Valeria the She-Bat*** and ***Knighthawk the Protector...*** The ***21st Century Mutant Turtles*** five-issue miniseries, originally scheduled to begin this summer from Archie's Spectrum Comics superhero line, will instead appear as a five-issue story arc in ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Adventures*** beginning with #62; Spectrum will launch later this year with new superhero titles... Due to a potential name conflict with a character created by Moebius, Valiant is changing the name of its ***Starwatchers*** series to ***Psi-Lords;*** the first two issues will be entitled ***Psi-Lords: Return of the Starwatchers***, with the name becoming ***Psi-Lords*** beginning with #3... Second printing alert: Harris Comics is doing a new printing of ***Vengeance of Vampirella #1,*** while Image is reprinting ***Gen 13 #1;*** both books sold out, leaving thousands of fans clamoring for nonexistent copies... Look for a Chapel action figure from Todd McFarlane's TMP toy line later this year... Big Entertainment, publishers of the upcoming Tekno Comics line, has acquired the comic book rights to a new Gene Roddenberry character and self-contained Universe (which will have no connection to Star Trek); the series will be completed by the late Roddenberry's wife, Majel Barrett, based on her husband's concepts...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ROB LIEFELD

by Cliff Biggers

Rob Liefeld has, at the age of twenty-three, become one of the best-known, most influential contemporary artists in the comics field. From his early days in the independent comics field, he went on to become very well known for his work on Hawk & Dove for DC, then on New Mutants and X-Force for Marvel. Liefeld turned the comics industry on its ear in 1991, though, when he announced his plans to join with other popular artists to start his own publishing company, Image Comics. Liefeld's Youngblood was Image's first release, and the original Youngblood miniseries was one of the most successful titles published by the new company.

Now it's two years after Liefeld's first issue of Youngblood, and more than one year after Youngblood #4. In the interim, he has taken a sabbatical from the comics field and is now returning, rejuvenated and eager to bring back Youngblood—and he's confident that this new take on Youngblood is going to be among his best work to date. Rob recently took some time from his busy schedule to discuss the new Youngblood... and the new Rob Liefeld.

What led you to decide to walk away from comics for almost a year?

I took a little break and I'm a very happy guy now. I think it got to the point where I was feeling pretty burned out and... not dissatisfied completely with what I was doing, but knowing that if I wanted to do the work that I expected of myself, then I had to take a break.

When we open ***Youngblood*** back up, you'll see that some time has passed. We explained in ***Team Youngblood #8***, part of the **Extreme Prejudice** story, why that particular Youngblood team—Shaft, Badrock, Diehard, and the rest—wasn't part of **Extreme Prejudice.** We touch upon that a little more when we bring them back in ***Team Youngblood #9,*** and continuing into ***Younglood #6.***

When I left the series, there was a different President in office, a different party; we have a new incumbent now, and while Clinton and his administration have been in the White House, I have been away from ***Youngblood.*** Issue four of the series came out in February of '92—I finished it in January, so that was a different period, and a lot has changed.

Actually, you'll see that the new President, the new regime, has made its own cosmetic changes and its own additions, and has given Youngblood a facelift; a few members have exited and some more have been added. It's weird... Youngblood still has an exciting pace to it in terms of the way the story is told, but I think there's a lot more looking at these people on a personal level.

There's not a punch thrown between ***Team Younglood #9*** and ***Youngblood #6*** for probably thirty-five pages—for me, that's a bit. I became less enamored with doing the huge fight scenes, which was something I was really enamored with at the time that I did ***Youngblood*** coming off ***X-Force.*** I was seduced by the power of Jack Kirby's work—I was really into Kirby at the time, everything he had done from the 50's, 60's, 70's, the ***Captain Victory*** stuff he did in the early 80's. I said, "I can do this! I can do this big and bold! And with today's formats I can do it bigger and bolder!" I think I got that out of my system.

I went back and said, "You know what? I want to get more into the personalities of these characters, more into the nuances." Somebody the other day said, "This is kind of like what you were doing at the end of your ***New Mutants*** run," and it actually dawned on me that yeah, it is. In the last few issues of the ***New Mutants*** before we ended that series, you saw a lot of stuff with them in their private quarters, arguing...

There was a sequence I did in ***New Mutants #99*** that Bob Harras was concerned about—he actually sent it back to me and asked me how I felt about changing it. I had Cable in a three-piece suit, in the library with spectacles on, reading a book; he said, "This doesn't fit the character." I said, "No, this is another side of the character." This guy who gets all suited up also has this other side to him. When Cable asked Warpath to join the New Mutants, he didn't fly to his base and ask him to fly to *his* base; they went out and had lunch in a restaurant in New York City and, over drinks, he said, "Would you consider coming with us?"

I think that's what ***Youngblood*** is about now; as we open, Badrock is going on a sabbatical, taking a few weeks off. We follow him on his vacation; he goes on some of the late-night talk shows, he goes skiing in Vail, Colorado. We're also dealing with Shaft having to come to grips with the fact that he doesn't like being the leader of this team. He was picked for his leadership abilities, but he doesn't like the spotlight that is put on him and this organization and general. He came from the FBI, which isn't as prominent to the public, as " out there." Now, his face is plastered on different things, and he's a celebrity; he isn't very comfortable with that. there are new members of the team that are being forced onto his team, and he has no control over them. Some he hits it off great with, and they become friends; others are just incorrigible, and they cause a lot of stress to the team.

Immediately, one of the new members becomes the most popular member of Youngblood ever, overnight. This puts some of the other members to whom that kind of status actually matters—well, it freaks them out!

I would describe ***Youngblood*** as "fun" this time. It's fun for me to do. I think there's a lot of stuff that I've learned over the past few years that I'm putting back into the comic, and I've gotten to know the characters a lot better.

What's the most distinctive element of Youngblood, in your eyes?

Youngblood's strongest point is the characterization and the humor. Cliff, I think you're going to be really surprised; there's some stuff in here that's unexpected—not unexpected in that it's going to blow your doors off... I'm so tired of hype. I've done this comic; I like this comic; hopefully, it'll find an audience that enjoys it.

I think you get to a certain point where you know the characters so well that they start telling you how they should be handled. I've done ***Team Youngblood #9, Youngblood #6, Youngblood #7,*** and I'm doing ***Younglood #8*** right now, and the first three episodes have a lot of humor to them. There's action and adventure, but there's also a humorous side of me that I've always kind of had but haven't brought out. I don't want to say that I'm a funny guy, but I can find the humor in situations and I'm trying to bring that to these characters.

I read all the Image titles. ***WildCATs,*** to me, is a very serious book; it's a race of people who have a covert agenda. It's not a grim book, but it's fast-paced action adventure. ***Cyberforce*** has a lot of the same things going for it; there's some humor in ***Cyberforce*** that I've always enjoyed, but it's a kind of dark us-against-them situation. ***Freak Force*** is played almost entirely for laughs from what I've seen, and that's a lot of the appeal of that book. I think ***Freak Force*** is a quirky book. ***Stormwatch,*** to me, is dead serious. I'd say that, so far, ***Team Youngblood*** is the same way: not a lot of humor, always out saving the world, don't have a lot of time to stop and laugh.

Through ***Youngblood,*** I've split my personality between all these characters. Sometimes I see things through Shaft's eyes, and other things I see through Badrock's eyes. One of the characters—and I won't tell you who, although I've told him—is based on Jim Valentino. I told Jim, "This guy's based on you, loosely." I took some things about Jim and in the comic book, I exaggerated them.

I would say that ***Youngblood*** is fun now, and I hope it is different in that way. So far, I haven't done a "let's save the world" issue; I think that the ***Youngblood*** miniseries was a lot of real fast-paced action that didn't stop and tell you what was going on. I've realized the importance of stopping and getting to know the characters and putting them in situations that are natural for them, that tell the reader more about them. If I'm going to like these characters any more, I'm going to have to care about them more, and so are all the readers.

I didn't have the patience to stop and look in on their private lives before, but now the focus has totally changed. Now, it's like, "Oh, do I have to throw a punch now?" The situation has totally changed.

Aren't you also working with Jim Shooter?

Right. I met Jim at a store signing last summer, and the store owner asked Jim and I to go out to breakfast the next day. I was a little hesitant because I had heard all the stories about Jim Shooter and I was terrified of him. I went out to breakfast, though, and we talked, and I realized that he had as many rumors about him as I've had about myself. I never worked with Jim—I wasn't at Marvel when he was there, so he's never directly affected me. I'd had no contact with him up until that point, but I had heard that he was a really intimidating guy. We sat down for breakfast, and he turned out to be a really sweet guy; we had a great breakfast, just talking about comics.

I was the biggest fan of the ***Avengers*** when he wrote it. He even wrote some stories in those Marvel novels, and I enjoyed those. His run on the ***Avengers*** was so epic, though, that I thought these were the greatest superheroes of all time. Every confrontation was life or death for the Marvel Universe; they had to rise to the occasion, they had to put aside their own problems to be heroes. And there were so many characters at the time! He introduced so many cool new concepts! The Ultron story, the Count Nefaria story that he did... that was my favorite comic, bar none, his ***Avengers.*** Then he left, and so did John Byrne and George Perez, who had sort of been rotating on the art. Then Jim came back a few years later with Al Milgrom and they did a long stretch which chronicled Yellowjacket's divorce from his wife and all that. I said, "You wrote my favorite issues of the ***Avengers."*** If I had to pick a favorite writer, it would have to be Jim, because I don't remember anything in comics as fondly as I remember those stories. When you can remember dialogue out of a comic book from fifteen years ago... well, I must have loved that book.

I said, "You wrote the definitive ***Legion,*** you wrote the definitive ***Avengers.*** Once I get ***Youngblood*** set up again, could you write me the definitive ***Youngblood?"*** He said, "I'd love to. It'd be a blast to work with you." He told me that my work was like an E-ticket roller-coaster ride; he said I portrayed power in my work very well. He gave me some compliments; he said that he recognized that we have different approaches to stories, but that both of them were entertaining. I got along very well with Jim, and he said I'd love to do this with you. He was here again in January, and I hit him up again; I said, "Are you interested in this?" and he said, "Absolutely."

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I think the fall and winter storylines are going to be Jim and me. We want to keep the storylines under wraps, but I know that Jim is going to do a great job, and I keep telling him that I don't want his version of a Rob Liefeld story—I want to draw a 100% Jim Shooter take on these characters. That should be the October, November, December issues of ***Youngblood;*** I want him to write as many issues as I can, but he said that four might be the limit. I'll take whatever I can get!

Will Youngblood be a monthly title when it resumes?

It'll be monthly throughout the summer. The reason I took the time off was to get ahead. I'm into the fourth book now, and I still have two months until the first one hits. That's the reason I took the break—I was so burned out. I think everyone gets burned out; I don't think it was exclusive to my situation. I'd been doing this for six years and I needed a break; I thought I'd never take a break. Being in the loop of comics becomes a drug; you're always looking for the juice. Getting that book off the presses and seeing it on the stands is, for anybody—writer or artist—it's just a drug. I feel like I'm going through withdrawal right now. I haven't been on the stands in a while, and I can't wait to get back.

The last issue of Youngblood was number four, and this issue is number six, which leads to the question...

Youngblood #5 was on the back of ***Brigade #4.*** That wrapped up the miniseries. There wasn't a separate ***Youngblood #5***, though.

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Thanks! Now, what about the Youngblood animated series?

Well, since I started negotiations with CBS, I realized that this wasn't the right place. I got the coldest feet I've ever gotten; three weeks before the decision was to be made, I thought, "This is not for me. It's the wrong route." I'm not saying that it isn't a great place to be for anyone, but it felt wrong for me.

We were running a tape of Youngblood all weekend long at Wondercon, and people were astounded by the quality of the animation. It was a four-minute tape that we had ready; it's very sharp, sophisticated animation. Fox has expressed interest in running it, maybe picking up six episodes. I have to see what they're interested in beyond that. I've also got a syndicator who said they'd love to carry it. AT this point, it's just a matter of deciding which one I'd rather go with.

From August until the middle of January, I was so focused on that animation, working with the animators—some of whom won't be part of the project any more—learning the animation process. We have a script for the pilot episode that's all ready to go upon deciding whether we're doing direct to video or going to syndication or whatever. Direct to video is something I'd love to do, getting straight into the hands of the consumer, but it's a decision that I have to weigh heavily because it might be something that might be a financial problem. I don't mean that I might not make much money—I mean that I might lose money.

I didn't do the ***Youngblood*** animated series to sell toys, I didn't do it to make money. I did it because it was another way to portray my characters. Seeing them move on the screen, it's something else entirely; it's a new experience, and it's exciting to me. They're not there as commercials to sell stuff. It's like the fulfillment of a dream. All I have to do is break even; I don't have to make any money. It would be bad to go into the hole for something like $300,000, though. We're looking into it, though.

There's an offer on my table right now from a huge animation studio that would like to step in and work with the people that I've assembled to make a straight-to-video Akira-type ninety-minute animated movie. We're talking big budget, a three million dollar ***Youngblood*** movie. That *has* to be considered!... But once I choose one of those, that's what I'm locked into. It's something that I have to weigh heavily, because I don't want to put out something that I'm disappointed in—not on this level. In comics, I can make mistakes that are quickly resolved. In animation, though, there's less room for error.

You alluded to toys back there; while the animation isn't being done to sell toys, are you still looking at the toy end?

I should stop here and say that being with Image has been a great experience, because so many doors have been opened for me. I have met with every possible toy company and they've all expressed interest, and there have been some preliminary figures made by some of the companies in terms of showing what they can do. I have some of the figures; others they took back, but I have photos of them, and it's exciting.

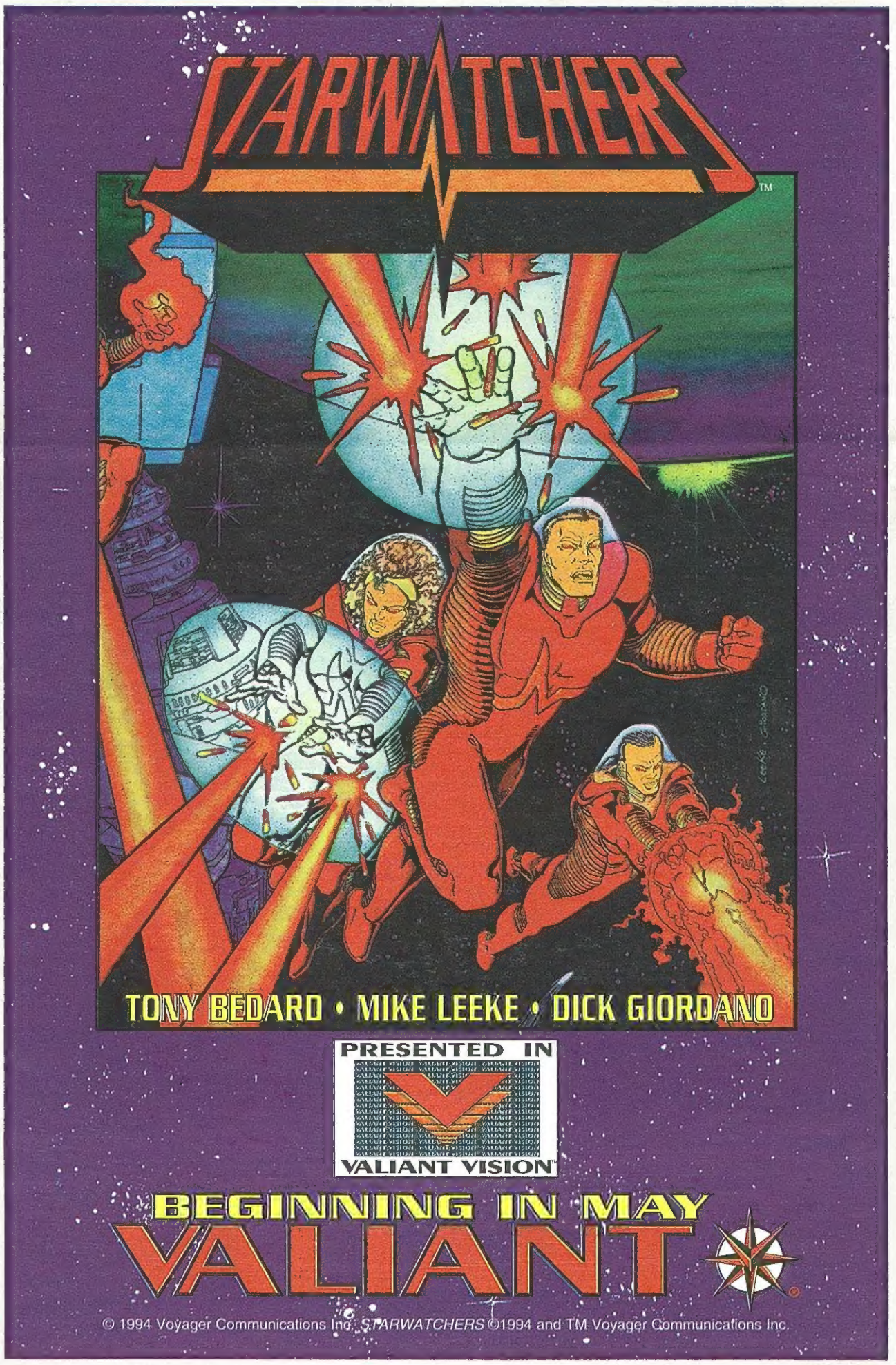
Two years ago, I figured if you make good toy figures, they'll sell themselves, and if you make great toys, the audience will find them. Unfortunately, it's not that way. The companies want to make their profits, and they're only going to buy the stuff which has the greatest commercial potential behind it; that commercial potential may be a movie tie-in, or a television series, or whatever. If you don't have the big movie or the cartoon behind it, then they're going to think twice about putting out your toys—or if they do take it, you're going to be a low priority, while that hundred million dollar action picture is going to get the big push. I'd love to convince someone that they should put out a line of super-hero action toys; if they produce them well, I think people would flock to them.

One thing I do want to say, though, is about Todd McFarlane's new toys. I co-created a character called Overtkill with Todd; I share the trademark and copyright with Todd, and that's going to be a figure from the Big Toddy and his Spawn toys. Last week, I granted Todd the license to produce a figure of Chapel for his second toy line, which is going to come out—I think—by Christmas. I'm discussing with Todd some other Extreme characters that may be in the toy line, because it gets to the point where you just say, "I want to hold my toys!" I have all five or six Cable figures, and the Deadpool—that entire X-Force line that I designed—but I'd like to have some of my own stuff. I've had a lot of opportunities offered to me because of the high profile that Image Comics and Extreme Studios has, but I have to ask myself, "Do I want to sell my soul for this?"

There are days when I feel like I just want to sell everything, because I'm so frustrated—and believe me, there are buyers out there who'll go "Okay, we'll take it!"—but when I calm back down, I realize that's not the way to do it. I want to hold on to it. I've ultimately come to the realization concerning Youngblood animated, Youngblood toys, that it might not happen until I'm fifty years old. Look at the X-Men. They've yet to have a movie, and it's only in the last few years of their thirty-year existence that they've even had an animated series. It may not happen for twenty five years now. I'm okay with that; I think it'll come, and I'm ion no rush. The core business that I'm in is comics, and my entire focus is making the Extreme line the strongest line of comics in the industry. We made some initial early mistakes, but this fall we corrected a lot of those and shipped those books out on time. We utilized a lot of new talent that hadn't quite cut their teeth yet, but now...

Chap Yaep, on ***Team Youngblood***—unbelievable work! He's developing into an exciting talent. Jeff Matsuda on ***The Newmen***—I look at ***Newmen #6*** that he's drawing, and it blows me away. The stories are really pulling together, and we're tightening up the continuity on all the books. ***Prophet #5*** really takes that book in a different direction.

We want to put out great comic books. You



know, the last great comic book that I read was "The Reign of the Supermen." I was skeptical at first—I thought, "What is this, four Supermen?"—but it was the best story I'd read in years. Each week, I was waiting for that next chapter! You know, there was a level of quality, a level of consistency with that work that we're striving for now.

A year ago, we bought a bunch of computers and started coloring. Now, a year later, we're not just coloring; we're doing some great work!

I've just turned twenty-six; a lot of the guys in the studio are young, twenty, twenty-one years old. I'll put the work I did when I was twenty-three up against the work that John Byrne did when he was twenty-three. There are guys in the business who didn't start working until they were twenty-six, twenty-seven; I was fortunate enough to start working when I was nineteen. I don't generally take somebody because they brought me the best, the most brilliant pages I've ever seen as a sample of their work; I take them on their potential to grow.

I don't look at my work right now and say, "I really like what I'm doing." I forecast the future: I'm a smart person, I have talent, I'm a fast learner, and I can't wait to see what I'm doing ten years from now, because I know I'm going to take everything I've learned and apply it back to my work—and I'm working with a bunch of guys who feel the same way.

I'm in love with the process of creating good comics, and that's what I think we're going to be doing more and more of down the line.

You have to be pleased with the way Image has developed in the past two years...

Cliff, I can't tell you how proud I am of Image. What we've set out to accomplish, we've accomplished. I certainly love it when an Extreme-related book hits, but there are weeks that we don't put books out. Maybe it's all Homage, books by Jim Lee or Mark Silvestri, or maybe it's Erik Larsen or Todd or Jim—and I love getting those books! Image stands for something, it stands for freedom to pursue a new direction.

Jim Salicrup from Topps was talking with me over the weekend; I worked for Jim back at Marvel, and he was always one of the more generous editors there, sharing his knowledge, and he was a real pleasure to talk to and a good teacher. He said, "You know, what you guys did is tremendous, really tremendous." So many people predicted our failure; they said we wouldn't be around for six months. We're heading into our third year, and we're having the time of our lives. We've never been more focused on what we do. The young talent we hired two years ago is blossoming in wonderful ways; that's the strength of Image. If we couldn't go out there and extend ourselves to the next generation, then we would have been over and done with in a minute. It started with Todd and Rob and Jim and Jim and Marc and Erik, but it had to go way beyond that for Image to be a success. I think that's in the process of happening right now.

I love Image Comics; I think we produce a really great package. For your dollar ninety-five, we give you a really great level of quality, and there are enthusiastic people working around the clock to bring that quality to you. I think that's the reason that Image will stay strong; we have a dedication to producing strong books, books that look good, books that read good. The pressure is off of us to set up the company; the company is running smoothly now, and we have people like Larry Marder, who's working wonders with the staff over at Image. We have young people going into their second or third year who can apply a lot of the knowledge they've taken in and help the company grow and become stronger than we've ever been.

It used to be Marvel and DC, and then there was Dark Horse... Now the comics industry has changed, and I'd like to think we have helped. We're certainly not the first creators who have spoken up for creators' rights, but it was risky, what we did. When we first stepped over that line, we didn't have a whole lot of friends in this industry. There weren't many people who actually patted us on the back and said "good luck" back then. In fact, ***Comic Shop News*** is one of the publications that supported us from the beginning; you guys are always very enthusiastic about the field.

Now I walk around and I see Harris Comics with a huge presence; Malibu with a huge presence; Valiant, Topps... it's exciting! I hope the comics industry continues to grow at a healthy rate. I'd like to think we contributed to that.

CSN CHARTS

TOP 50 COMICS

CSN's Top Seller charts are based on figures supplied by the two major distributors, Diamond Distribution and Capital City Distribution, as well as figures by a cross-section of comics speciality shops. The distributor's figures represent retailer orders placed on the titles, while the information from stores represents copies sold.

1. Spawn-Batman Crossover
2. Uncanny X-Men 313
3. Superman- Doomsday: Hunter-Prey 1
4. Adventures of Cyclops & Phoenix 2
5. WildCATS 10
6. Wolverine 82
7. Detective 675
8. Action Comics 699
9. Superman 90
10. Amazing Spider-Man 390
11. X-Force 35
12. X-Men 2099 9
13. Spider-Man 46
14.. Superman: Man of Steel 34
15. Green Lantern 52
16. Cyberforce 4
17. Batman 508
18. Robin 6
19. Gen 13 3
20. Beavis & Butt-Head 4
21. Incredible Hulk 418
22. Prophet 5
23. Web of Spider-Man 113
24. X-Factor 103
25. Spectacular Spider-Man 213
26. Cable 12
27. Batman: Shadow of the Bat 28
28. Stormwatch 9
29. Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight 61
30. Venom: The Mace 2
31. Savage Dragon 9
32. Spider-Man 47
33. Detective Comics Annual 7
34. Superboy 5
36. Kindred 2
37. Ghost Rider 50
38. Superman: Man of Steel Annual 3
39. Catwoman 10
40. Excalibur 77
41. Star Wars: Droids 1
42. Fantastic Four 389
43. Excalibur 78
44. Sandman 60
45. X-Factor Annual 9
46. Ghost Rider 2099 2
47. Spider-Man/X-Factor: Shadowgames 2
48. Bartman 2
49. Brigade 9
50. Team Youngblood 8

TOP DOLLAR COMICS

The following comics, graphic novels and trade paperbacks were given Top Dollar ratings based on the dollar volume of the copies sold (or are expected to sell) during the late April and May sales period.

1. Superman- Doomsday: Hunter-Prey 1
2. Spawn-Batman Crossover
3. Detective Comics 675
4. Adventures of Cyclops & Phoenix 2
5. Wild CATs 10
6. Amazing Spider-Man 390
7. Wolverine 82
8. Spider-Man 46
9. Uncanny X-Men 313
10. Cyberforce 4
11. Incredible Hulk 418
12. Action Comics 699
13. Web of Spider-Man 113
14. Superman 90
15. Spectacular Spider-Man 213
16. Gen 13 3
17. Beavis & Butt-Head 4
18. X-Force 35
19. X-Men 2099 9
20. Venom: The Mace 2
21. Cable 12
22. Prophet 5
23. Detective Comics Annual 7
24. Superman: Man of Steel 34
25. Green Lantern 52
27. Superman: Man of Steel Annual 3
28. Batman 508
29. Robin 6
30. Stormwatch 9
31. Batman: Shadow of the Bat 28
32. Ghost Rider 50
33. Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight 61
34. Star Wars: Droids 1
35. Savage Dragon 9
36. X-Factor 103
37. Catwoman Annual 1
38. X-Factor Annual 9
39. Sin City: A Dame to Kill For 5
40. Spider-Man 47
41. Kindred 2
42. Excalibur 78
43. Excalibur 77
44. Rune 3/Ultraverse Premiere 1
45. Sandman 60
46. Spider-Man/X-Factor: Shadowgames 2
47. Superboy 5
48. Conan the Adventurer 1
49. Dreadstar 1
50. Catwoman 10

TOP 10 BLACK & WHITE COMICS

1. Bone 13
2. Cerebus 181
3. Ranma 1/2 Part Three 5
4. Shi 1
5. Dark Horse Presents 84
6. Maison Ikkoku Part Two 4
7. Mermaid Scar 1
8. Savage Sword of Conan 222
9. Bubblegum Crisis: Grand Mal 2
10. Conan Saga 87

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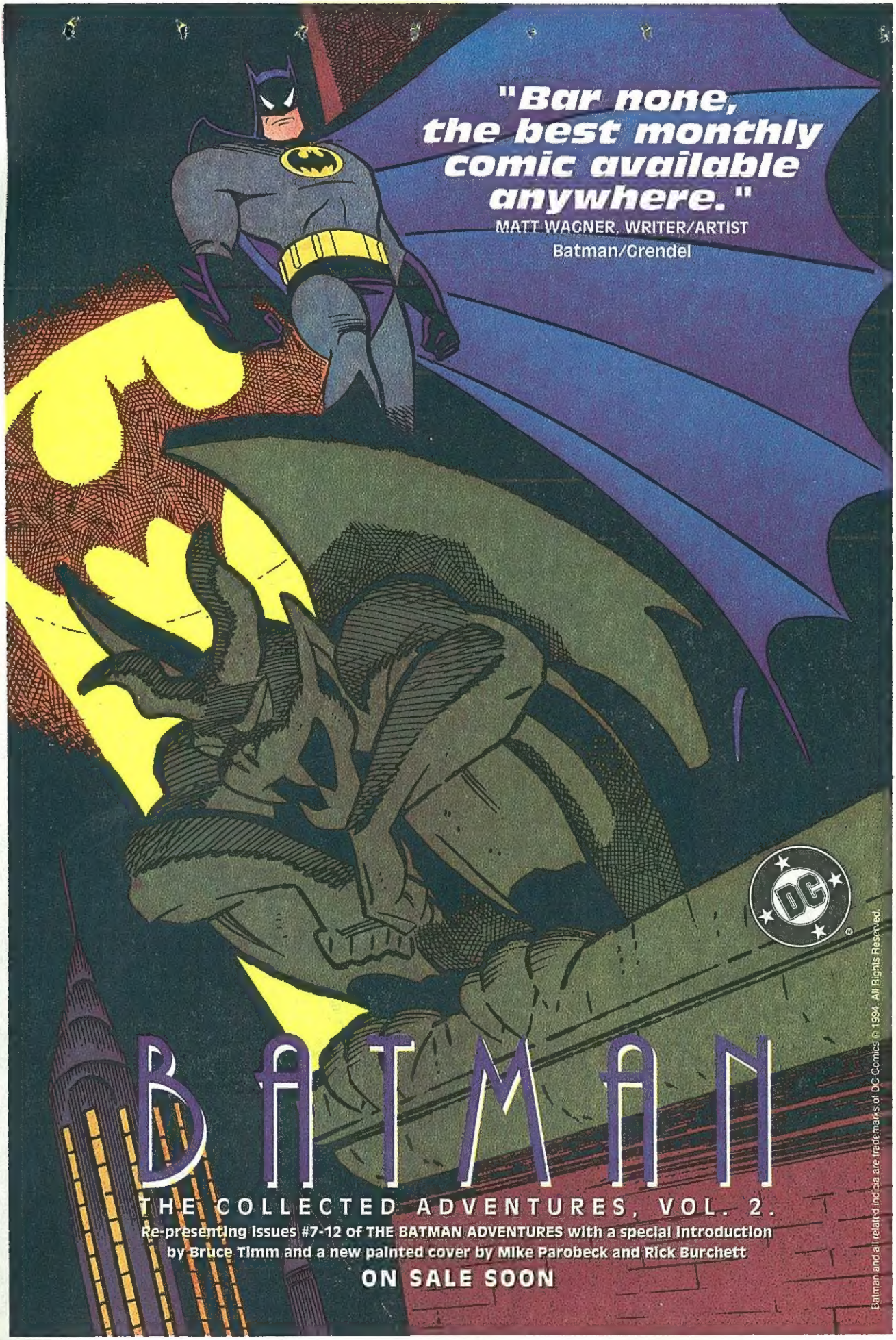
TOP TEN NON-COMICS

The Top Ten Non-Comics is based on number and not dollar value. This category includes graphic novels, hardcovers, trade paperbacks, portfolios, etc. It includes books that actually were on sale during the May sales period.

1. Magic: The Gathering Booster Packs
2. Spider-Man Trading Cards
3. Batman: Saga of the Dark Knight Trading Cards
4. Batman Stickers
5. Wizard 34
6. Hero Illustrated 7
7. Penthouse Comix 1
8. Death: The High Cost of Living TPB
9. X-Men: The X-Cutioner's Song TP
10. Overstreet Price Guide TPB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